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Latin Terrorists' Leader Retains Support of CIA

For 30 years the CIA has been bankrolling a man reported to be the evil genius behind the right-wing terror that has claimed tens of thousands of lives in Central America.

Several officials in the intelligence community and the National Security Council have vehemently protested the continuation of what they consider a sinister, shameful relationship. But intelligence sources told my associates Dale Van Atta and Jon Lee Anderson that the funding continues despite the opposition.

The CIA seems untroubled by the fact that the White House has denounced the right-wing death squads in El Salvador. Yet the death squads may have gotten their inspiration from the CIA's protege, Mario Sandoval Alarcon.

Sandoval, a former vice president of Guatemala, now heads the National Liberation Movement, which styles itself "the party of organized violence." At 60, he is a solid, chunky, cold-eyed hombre.

The National Liberation Movement was founded by the CIA in 1953 as a paramilitary force with one

immediate goal: overthrow leftist President Jacobo Arbenz Guzman. It succeeded the following year.

By the mid-1960s, Sandoval had emerged as a leader of the organization, and he was evidently a bitter and vengeful man. One former confidant said Sandoval had once been captured by leftists and tortured with an electric cattle prod.

In his fury, he began to define communists as just about anyone who didn't share his fierce anti-communist views, and to equate them with the people who had tortured him. It was about the same time that the first death squad in Central America was formed, with close ties to the National Liberation Movement.

The death squad took the name La Mano Blanca (The White Hand), and began to terrorize leftist suspects in Guatemala. It was responsible for as many as 8,000 deaths in the 1960s, plus thousands more during a resurgence in the 1970s. In the 1980 election campaign the National Liberation Movement all but acknowledged its association with the death squad.

The idea of "anti-communist" death squads proved to be exportable. Carbon copies of the Guatemalan unit appeared throughout Central and South America. The bloodiest work in recent years has been done by the death squads in El Salvador.

The underground terror groups go by different names. In Guatemala alone, there have been the Secret Anti-Communist Army, Organization Zero and the Order of Death. I recently disclosed evidence that the death squads throughout Latin America are linked, and are "fronted" by the regional affiliate of the World Anti-Communist League.

In 1981, in a public speech, the regional anti-communist league's secretary paid extravagant tribute to Sandoval and the National Liberation Movement for being "on the front line" of the battle against communism.

Sandoval has been a pillar of the World Anti-Communist League. In 1978, when he was Guatemala's vice president, he spoke to the league's 11th annual conference and denounced everyone from President Carter to the Catholic church as tools of marxism. His complaint: their stand on human rights and their criticism of the death squads.

Perhaps it was no coincidence that the death squads soon began their bloodiest rampage, killing tens of thousands of suspected leftists and sympathizers in Guatemala and El Salvador. And it certainly was no coincidence that Amnesty International traced the Guatemalan death squads during that period to the presidential palace.

Meanwhile, the CIA continues to provide secret funding to Sandoval.